

GENERAL NOTES

Soaring geese at Tulelake, California.—At 1:10 P.M., February 27, 1944, while making observations on birds at the Tulelake National Wildlife Refuge, Tulelake, California, I heard the calling of a flock of Snow Geese (*Chen hyperborea*) as it passed rather high overhead. Noting that their flight was somewhat different from normal, I examined them through field glasses. The entire flock of 22 Snow Geese was clearly riding with outstretched set wings what was evidently a rising current of air. Their soaring was much like that of the Little Brown Crane (*Grus c. canadensis*) and Sandhill Crane (*G. c. tabida*) which I have watched in eastern New Mexico under similar weather conditions. I watched the flock of Snow Geese for more than 10 minutes as it drifted northward. During that time, I noted only an occasional wing beat. Shortly after the flock passed, a flock of 12 White-fronted Geese (*Anser albifrons*) passed, employing the same flight tactics. Their flight was also in a northerly direction. At the time of the observations the day was clear and warm, with only a slight breeze from the north. The soaring of these geese was evidently similar to that reported by Williams (*Condor*, 44, 1942:76) near Brigham City, Utah, in the fall of 1941.—CLARENCE A. SOOTER, *U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Alice, Texas.*

Reaction of American Mergansers to Herring Gull depredations.—On February 16, 1943, Burt L. Monroe, Thomas Smith, and I observed the following episode, which illustrates some aspects of bird psychology. A flock of 12 to 15 Herring Gulls (*Larus argentatus*) and 8 American Mergansers (*Mergus merganser americanus*) were fishing eight miles east of Louisville, Kentucky, at the mouth of Harrod's Creek. The small creek had frozen to within a hundred yards of its mouth, but the bay and river were open. We drove close to the shore and remained partially concealed in our automobile behind a large tree.

Soon a male merganser after a deep dive came up with a large fish in its bill. Instantly five or six of the gulls took wing and converged on the duck. The nearest gull easily snatched the fish, but being unable to swallow so large a mouthful soon lost it to another gull. The other gulls fought for possession until the fish was torn to bits. This happened several times, with the result that the mergansers were losing most of their catch. (With the broad expanse of the Ohio River, which was here more than 1,000 yards wide, to choose from, the mergansers remained to endure the persecution of the gulls probably because of the superior fishing at the mouth of the frozen creek.)

After a while, we noticed a gradual change in the fishing tactics of the mergansers. One came up with a fish. As usual, several gulls went for it, but before they could snatch it, the merganser dived with the fish still in its mouth. He came up 20 feet away in an open space and while swimming as rapidly as possible swallowed the food before the gulls could reach him. One gull, swooping too late for the fish, struck the merganser with all its weight, causing him to bob up and down, yet not frightening him enough to make him fly. Other mergansers also developed a watchfulness which enabled them to retain more and more of their fish. They seemed to pick spots in which to surface as remote as possible from the gulls, and they swallowed their catch quickly while avoiding the attacks of the gulls by swimming or diving.

After failing repeatedly to rob the mergansers of their fish, the gulls gradually lost interest and drifted farther out from shore, allowing the mergansers to fish unmolested. The ability of the American Mergansers to modify their behavior successfully in the face of the depredations of the gulls shows a surprising degree of adaptability.—HARVEY B. LOVELL, *Biology Department, University of Louisville, Louisville, Kentucky.*